

Canary rockfish have been recorded taken near Bag Rock, now part of the CCA. Another point, that Tom didn't bring up, is that commercial fishermen at times have found it to their benefit to run trips out of Santa Barbara, go up around the corner from Conception as far north as Arguello, make their catch and deliver back into Santa Barbara. All catches didn't come from south of Conception, even if landed south of Conception, although all of these landings were counted toward the catch south of Conception. Movement of the boundary line to 30 fm would send a message to the very strapped recreational and CPFV anglers that the Council recognizes there is a new stock assessment for bocaccio that will allow for more access to the resource next year and can help out with a little more access this year to get through the rest of year. Understand problems with changing the OY mid-year, although would probably recommend that be done. Thus, just asking that the Council give back something in recognition of the new abundance of bocaccio and in recognition that canary is really not an issue south of Conception.

2 ALTERNATIVES INCLUDING PROPOSED ACTION

This chapter describes the alternatives, or potential actions. There are four alternatives analyzed in this EA: status quo, moving the conservation area boundary line from 20 fm to 30 fm between 36° N. lat. and the US/ Mexico border, moving the boundary line from 20 fm to 30 fm between 36° N. lat. and 34°27' N. lat., and moving the boundary line from 20 fm to 30 fm between 34°27' N. lat. and the US/Mexico border. These alternatives differ from each other in the area of ocean off southern California that would open to fishing inshore of 30 fm. These alternatives were presented as a proposal by the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) at the Council's June meeting. They were developed as options to relieve restrictions on commercial nontrawl and recreational fisheries in southern California and reviewed by the Council for their impacts on bocaccio and canary rockfish, overfished groundfish species. All alternatives are proposed for September through December 2003 only. This time frame was selected because it had less impacts on overfished species than considering the alternatives for July through December of 2003. In addition, there was not adequate time to complete the required analyses and draft regulations before September 1, 2003. The proposed action would only apply to the remainder of the 2003 fishing year, until December 31, 2003. Regulations for 2004 will be analyzed in a future NEPA analysis. All of the alternatives consider whether or not to shift a boundary line in waters along different portions of the southern California coast. Thus, the alternatives differ in the area (measured in square miles) of ocean that would open to groundfish fishing with commercial nontrawl and recreational gear. The conservation area boundary line is a management measure used to delineate where fishing with a particular gear type, such as fixed gear, or in a certain sector of the groundfish fishery, such as the recreational sector, may occur. For 2003, large gear and sector specific closures have been implemented, known as rockfish conservation areas (RCAs). The non-trawl RCA, a closed area affecting the commercial non-trawl fleet (both limited entry and open access non-trawl gear) is the subject of all four alternatives. In addition, the boundary line which marks the closed area for the recreational sector is also the subject of all four alternatives, although this boundary line is not part of an RCA per se. The boundary line for the recreational sector is simply termed a boundary line or management line and recreational fishing for groundfish is prohibited seaward of that line. Generally, the RCA boundary lines are generated by a series of latitude and longitude coordinates that when connected by straight lines between points, make a line that approximates a fathom contour. The reason for re-creating the fathom contour with a series of latitude/longitude coordinates is for enforcement purposes. In-the-air enforcement cannot read the actual fathom contours and must rely on a series of coordinates approximating the line to determine whether vessels are or are not fishing in the closed areas. The exception to this standard is the 20 fm boundary line off southern California. California has used a 20 fm depth contour for groundfish management since 2001. The boundary line had already been established in management as a fathom contour and not a line with a series of coordinates approximating the fathom contour. In addition, this line falls almost entirely in California state waters. While this complicates enforcement by air surveillance, CDFG recommended and NMFS approved that the 20 fm line remain a depth contour line for 2003.

2.1 Status Quo Alternative (No Action Alternative)

The status quo alternative, or no action alternative, is to maintain the 20 fm boundary line as the eastern boundary of the non-trawl Rockfish Conservation Area (RCA) for the commercial fixed gear fleet, both limited entry and open access, and as the boundary for the recreational fishery south of 40°10' N. lat. during July through December. This management measure was also analyzed in the 2003 Specs EIS. Although this alternative does not meet the purpose and need, it is evaluated as a comparison of impacts as required by NEPA.

2.2 30 fm Boundary Line from 36° N. lat. to US/Mexico Border Alternative (36° to Mexico Alternative)

The 30 fm Boundary Line Alternative, between 36° N. lat. and the US/Mexico Border, would move the boundary line from 20 fm to 30 fm during September through December. This line change would affect both the commercial fixed gear and recreational sectors.

2.3 30 fm Boundary Line from 36° N. lat. to 34°27' N. lat. Alternative (36° to 34°27' Alternative)

The 30 fm Boundary Line Alternative, from 36° N. lat. to 34°27' N. lat., would move the boundary line from 20 fm to 30 fm during September through December. The area from 36° N. lat. to 34°27' N. lat. is commonly referred to as the Morro Bay area. This line change would affect both the commercial fixed gear and recreational sectors.

2.4 30 fm Boundary Line from 34°27' N. lat. to US/Mexico Border Alternative (34°27' to Mexico Alternative— Preferred Alternative)

The 30 fm Boundary Line Alternative, between 34°27' N. lat. and the US/Mexico Border, would move the boundary line from 20 fm to 30 fm during September through December. The area from 34°27' N. lat. to the US/Mexico border is commonly referred to as the Southern California Bight area. This line change would affect both the commercial fixed gear and recreational sectors.

2.5 Issues considered but eliminated from further analysis

Different dates for implementing the possible line changes were discussed. In particular, the alternatives for the proposed action, except for status quo, were all discussed with effective dates of July through December. Guidance from the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) states that alternatives must be feasible and make common sense as noted in CEQ's 40 most asked questions #2. During review of the data for southern California, moving the line effective July through December rather than September through December is predicted to result in the OY for canary rockfish being exceeded. Unlike bocaccio, there is no new information on canary rockfish showing increased biomass and productivity, therefore potentially exceeding the OY in 2003 is not a feasible alternative and does not meet the purpose and need for this action. This option for each of the alternatives was eliminated from further analysis.

3 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

This chapter describes the environment, in resources, that would be affected either directly or indirectly by the alternatives. The extent of the discussion for each resource is relative to the predicted impact to that resource. Thus, resources expected to only be minimally impacted are discussed briefly. While the federally managed Pacific coast groundfish fishery occurs in waters off Washington, Oregon and California